

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9837
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 NEW DELHI 3201

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS: PORTENTS FOR THE FUTURE

REF: NEW DELHI 3129

SUMMARY: THE MOST IMPORTANT RESULT OF THE STATE
ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IS THE EMERGENCE OF MRS. GANDHI
AS THE FOCAL POINT FOR OPPOSITION TO THE JANATA
GOVERNMENT. THE OUTCOME SUGGESTS THAT MANY VOTERS
ACCEPTED HER CLAIM TO REPRESENT THE "REAL" CONGRESS.
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THE FORMER PM MAY SEEK TO RETURN TO PARLIAMENT,
BUT IN ANY EVENT SHE CAN BE EXPECTED TO STEP UP
HER CONFRONTATIONAL STANCE AND ASSERT HERSELF AS THE
POPULIST CHAMPION OF THE COMMON PEOPLE. THE CONGRESS
(R) DEBACLE HAS PRODUCED SPECULATION THAT THE
PARTY MAY NOT SURVIVE. IT IS LIKELY TO SUFFER
DEFECTIONS TO MRS. GANDHI'S CONGRESS (I) AS WELL

AS TO JANATA. EVEN IF IT DOES STEM THE FLOW OF
DEFLECTIONS, THE CONGRESS (R) WILL SUFFER FROM AN ACUTE
IDENTITY CRISIS. ITS FUTURE WILL HAVE AN
IMPACT UPON THE JANATA, AS THE RULING PARTY TRIES
TO RESOLVE ITS INTERNAL DIFFERENCES OVER ACCPETING
DEFECTING CONGRESS (R) FIGURES. THE JANATA DID EN-
LARGE ITS FOOTHOLD IN THE SOUTH AS A RESULT OF THESE
ELECTIONS, BUT ITS GENERALLY DISAPPOINTING SHOWING
HAS SET BACK ITS HOPES OF BECOMING AN ALL-INDIA
PARTY. RECRIMINATIONS OVER THE FAILURE OF THE
JANATA'S "SOUTHERN STRATEGY" MAY OCCUPY THE PARTY
LEADERSHIP FOR SOME TIME. ON THE BRIGHTER SIDE,
HOWEVER, THE ELECTION RESULTS MAY SPUR THE RULING
PARTY TO STOP RESTING ON ITS PAST LAURELS, PULL ITS
DISPARATE ELEMENTS TOGETHER AND COME TO GRIPS WITH
NATIONAL PROBLEMS. TWO BROAD TRENDS MAY EMERGE IN THE
FUTURE COURSE OF INDIAN POLITICS: A RETURN TO THE
POLITICS OF CONFRONTATION OF EARLIER YEARS AND AN INCREASE
IN CENTER/STATE TENSIONS. THESE ARE ONLY PRELIMINARY
ASSESSMENTS OF THE OUTCOME AND WE BELIEVE IT IS PREMATURE
TO PREDICT HOW THIS "REALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES" WILL
ULTIMATELY SORT ITSELF OUT. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH THE RESULTS (BEING REPORTED SEPTTEL) ARE
NOT YET COMPLETE, THE GENERAL TRENDS EVIDENCED IN
THE OUTCOME OF THE STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS NOW SEEM
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CLEAR ENOUGH TO VENTURE A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF
WHAT THESE LANDMARK STATE RACES MAY MEAN FOR THE
INDIAN NATIONAL POLITICAL SCENE.

2. THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS IS
THE EMERGENCE OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI
AS THE FOCAL POINT FOR OPPOSITION TO THE JANATA
GOVERNMENT. HER AUDACIOUS STRATEGY OF SPLITTING
THE CONGRESS PARTY ON THE EVE OF THESE CRUCIAL MINI-
GENERAL ELECTIONS HAS PAID OFF FOR HER TO AN EXTENT
THAT NO OBSERVER DARED PREDICT. THE VICTORY OF HER
PARTY IN KARNATAKA CAN BE EXPLAINED AWAY, AT LEAST
IN PART, AS THE HANDIWORK OF FORMER CHIEF MINISTER
DEVRAJ URS. BUT HER WHOLLY UNEXPECTED WIN IN
ANDHRA AND HER RESPECTABLE SHOWING IN MAHARASHTRA
MUST BE CREDITED MAINLY TO HER OWN EFFORTS. THE
OUTCOME SUGGESTS THAT MANY VOTERS ACCEPTED HER
CLAIM THAT SHE REPRESENTS THE "REAL"
CONGRESS. THIS CLAIM HAS NOW, IN EFFECT, BEEN
CONFIRMED AND HER PARTY IS LIKELY TO EMERGE IN
IN CONSEQUENCE AS THE MAJOR OPPOSITION GROUP TO JANATA.

3. IN THE WAKE OF HER TRIUMPH, SPECULATION HAS

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9838
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 NEW DELHI 3201

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

FOCUSSED ON MRS. GANDHI'S NEXT MOVES. WITH HER
PARTY NOW LIKELY THROUGH FURTHER DEFECTIONS FROM
CONGRESS (R) TO BECOME THE PRICIPAL AND "OFFICIAL"
OPPOSITION IN PARLIAMENT, SHE MAY BE TEMPTED TO SEEK
TO RETURN THERE, EITHER DURING THIS SPRING'S ROUND
OF ELEKTIONS TO THE RAJYA SABHA OR, MORE FORMIDABLY,
IN A LOK SABHA BY-ELECTION. WHETHER OR NOT SHE CHOOSES
THIS PARLIAMENTARY OPTION, SHE CAN BE EXPEKTED TO STEP
UP THE PACE OF HER CONFRONTATIONAL STANCE VIS A VIS
THE JANATA AND FIND APPROPRIATE OCCASIONS TO TAKE TO
THE STREEYTS IN AN EFFORT FURTHER TO ENHANCE HER
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IMAGE AS AN ASSERTIVE POPULIST CHAMPION OF THE COMMON PEOPLE.

4. THE CONGRESS (R) DEBACLE HAS PRODUCED WIDESPREAD SPECULATION THAT THE PARTY MAY NOT SURVIVE. MRS. GANDHI'S SUCCESSES WILL PROBABLY HAVE A BANDWAGON EFFECT, AS CONGRESSMEN SCURRY TO ABANDON THEIR BROKEN PARTY. MANY FENCE-SITTERS WHO HAD DECLINED TO CHOOSE SIDES AFTER THE JANUARY 2 SPLIT WILL NOW MAKE UP THEIR MINDS AND THE RANKS OF CONGRESS (I) MP'S IN PARLIAMENT ARE LIKELY TO SWELL RAPIDLY. EVEN THOSE MP'S WHO HAD PLEDGED LOYALTY TO THE REDDY/CHAVAN CONGRESS (ABOUT 90 IN THE LOK SABHA AND 80 IN THE RAJYA SABHA) ARE UNDOUBTEDLY REASSESSING THEIR DECISIONS. CONGRESS (I) GENERAL SECRETARY BUTA SINGH HAS ALREADY DECLARED THAT HIS PARTY'S DOORS ASRE WIDE OPEN FOR DEFECTORS. FOR MANY SOUTHERN CONGRESSMEN AT LEAST, THE ELIMINATION OF THE CONGRESS (R) IN KARNATAKA AND ANDHRA MAY LEAVE THEM LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO COME TO TERMS WITH MRS. GANDHI. THEIR WAY, AND THAT OF OTHER CONGRESS (R) LEADERS, MAY BE EASED BY "UNITY MOVES" WHICH WILL PROVIDE SOME MINOR FIG LEAF TO THEIR SURRENDER TO THE LOGIC OF THE POWER EQUATION. FOR SOME OF MRS. GANDHI'S MORE DETERMINED AND VOCAL OPPONENTS, HOWEVER, A RE-CONCILIATION WITH HER SEEMS UNLIKELY, AT LEAST FOR THE PRESENT. THEY MAY SEEK ENTRY INTO JANATA OR BECOME INDEPENDENTS. SOME, SUCH AS BRAHMANANDA REDDY, MAY SIMPLY RETIRE FROM THE SCENE.

5. EVEN IF THE CONGRESS (R) DOEN MANAGE TO STEM THE FLOW OF ANTICIPATED DEFECTIONS OFR A WHILE, IT WILL SUFFER FROM AN ACUTE IDENTITY CRISIS. THE PARALLEL

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WITH THE 1969 SPLIT IS INEVITABLE. THE RUMP CONGRESS (O) WHICH REMAINED AFTER MRS. GANDHI TOOK THE BULK OF THE PARTY WITH HER MANAGED TO CONTINUE AS A SMALL BUT SURPRISINGLY UNITED GROUP MAINLY DUE TO THE FORCE OF SUCH VETERAN FIGURES AS MORARJI DESAI. AS A SENIOR JANATA MP REMARKED, THE REDDY/CHAVAN CONGRESS IS NOTABLY LACKING IN SUCH STRONG AND DETERMINED FIGURES WILLING TO WANDER IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS. THIS POTENTIAL DIFFICULTY FOR THE CONGRESS (R) TO SURVIVE AS A DISTINCT POLITICAL ENTITY WILL BE COMPOUNDED BY THE IMMEDIATE QUESTION OF ITS RELATIONS WITH THE JANATA IN THE TWO STATES WHERE NOT PARTY SECURED A MAJORITY. THE CONGRESS (R)

IS PRESUMABLY DEBATING THE MERITS OF LENDING TACIT
SUPPORT TO THE JANATA IN ASSAM AND MAHARASHTRA SO THAT
STABLE GOVERNMENTS CAN BE FORMED. YET TO DO SO WOULD
EVENTUALLY OBLITERATE ANY DISTINCTION BETWEEN IT AND THE
RULING PARTY AND COULD PROBABLY PAVE THE WAY FOR ITS
EVENTUAL ABSORTION INTO THE JANATA. MRS. GANDHI WOULD
CERTAINLY SEIZE UPON SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT AS FURTHER
PROOF THAT HERS IS THE "REAL" CONGRESS, AND THAT HER
CHARGES OF CONGRESS (R) - JANATA COLLUSION WERE TRUE.

6. THE FUTURE OF THE CONGRESS (R) HAS IMPLICATIONS
FOR THE JANATA AS WELL. THE DEBATE OVER WHETHER TO
ACCEPT DEFECTING CONGRESSMEN WILL UNDOUBTEDLY OCCUPY
LEADERS OF THE RULING PARTY IN COMING WEEKS. IT IS
EVIDENT THE CERTAIN COMPONENTS (MAINLY THOSE FIGURES
WITH A COMMON CONGRESS PAST) WOULD WELCOME SUCH AN
INFLOW IN ORDER TO OFFSET THE PREPONDERANCE OF THE
JANA SANGH AND BLD ELEMENTS. THESE LATTER GROUPS,
LED BY HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH AND JANA SANGH
ORGANIZER NANAJI DESHMUKH, ARE LIKELY TO OPPOSE SUCH

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 NEW DELHI 3201

AN "OPEN DOOR" POLICY, FOR OBVIOUS REASONS. A MAJOR ARGUMENT LIKELY TO BE USED IN THIS INTERNAL DEBATE IS THAT DEFECTING CONGRESSMEN, DISOWNED BY THEIR OWN CONSTITUENTS IN THE STATE ELECTIONS, HAVE LITTLE TO OFFER THE JANATA. IN ADDITION, IT WILL BE ARGUED (JUSTIFIABLY) THAT THE PARTY'S STRATEGY OF SEEKING RECENTLY-DEFECTED CONGRESS FIGURES TO RUN AS JANATA CANDIDATES IN THE SOUTHERN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS WAS NOT NOTABLY SUCCESSFUL AND EVEN MAY HAVE TARNISHED THE PARTY WITH THE BRUSH OF OPPORTUNISM. HOW THE JANATA LEADERSHIP WILL RESOLVE THIS QUESTION IS STILL UNCERTAIN. A SECRETARY TO THE JANATA PARLIAMENTARY PARTY TELLS US THAT HE

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EXPECTS TO HAVE 10 TO 12 CONGRESS MP'S FROM THE SOUTH IN HIS POCKET SOON AND THAT BY THE END OF THE CURRENT BUDGET SESSION AS MANY AS 40 LOB SABHA MEMBERS MAY JOIN THE RULING PARTY. HE DID NOT FORESEE THAT THIS INFUX WOULD CAUSE SERIOUS DIVISIONS WITHIN THE JANATA.

7. JANATA DID FAIR BETTER IN ANDHRA AND KARNATAKA THAN IN THE 1977 LOB SABHA POLL. YET, THIS ENLARGED FOOT-HOLD IN THE SOUTH CAN BE OF LITTLE SOLACE TO A PARTY WHICH WAS SO CLEARLY INTENT ON EXPANDING ITS BASE BEYOND THE NORTHERN "HINDI BELT." WE EXPECT THAT REPRISALS FOR THE FAILURE OF THE "SOUTHERN STRATEGY" WILL OCCUPY JANATA COUNCILS FOR SOME TIME. PARTY PRESIDENT CHANDRA SHEKHAR AND SOME OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIES MAY COME UNDER PRESSURE TO RESIGN FOR SUCH ERRORS AS RELYING UPON MANY FORMER CONGRESSMEN TO CARRY THE JANATA BANNER IN THE SOUTH. AT THE SAME TIME, THIS SETBACK AT THE JANATA MAY HAVE SOME BENEFICIAL EFFECTS. WELL-WISHERS HOPE THAT THE ELECTION RESULTS WILL FINALLY SPUR THE RULING PARTY TO STOP RESTING ON ITS PAST LAURELS, PULL ITS DISPARATE ELEMENTS TOGETHER, AND DECISIVELY COME TO GRIPS WITH PRESSING NATIONAL PROBLEMS, PARTICULARLY NOW THAT THEIR MOST FORMIDABLE ENEMY HAS EMERGED AS THEIR PRINCIPAL CHALLENGER. ERRORS OF ELECTORAL STRATEGY ASIDE, THE LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE IN THE STATES MAY CONVINCE THE JANATA LEADERSHIP THAT IT MUST NOW GET DOWN TO WORK IF IT IS TO CAPTURE A NATIONAL MASS FOLLOWING. THIS COULD SPUR EFFORTS IN BOTH PARTY ORGANIZATIONAL WORK AND IN FORMULATING AND IMPLEMENTING GOVERNMENT POLICIES.

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8. TWO BROAD TRENDS MAY NOW DEVELOP IN THE FUTURE COURSE OF INDIAN POLITICS. FOR ONE, THERE MAY BE A RETURN TO THE POLITICS OF CONFRONTATION WHICH CHARACTERIZED THE 1973-75 PERIOD. THE ANTICIPATED DECLINE OF THE CONGRES (R) AS A VIABLE FORCE AT THE CENTER WILL REMOVE A RESPONSIBLE OPPOSITION BLOC WHICH SEEMED INCLINED TO COOPERATE WITH THE JANATA GOVERNMENT ON CERTAIN ISSUES. IF MRS. GANDHI'S CONGRESS (I) DOES BECOME THE MAJOR NON-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION, AS WE BELIEVE LIKELY, IT MAY FEEL LESS CONSTRAINED TO ACT RESPONSIBLY. ASIDE FROM UNDERTAKING AGITATIONS, SHE CAN BE EXPECTED TO LASH OUT AGGRESSIVELY AGAINST ANY GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND ACTIONS SHE BELIEVES SHE CAN EFFECTIVELY EXPLOIT. THESE MAY WELL INCLUDE ISSUES OF INTEREST TO THE U.S., SUCH AS NUCLEAR MATTERS. FACED WITH A MORE DETERMINED AND ASSERTIVE OPPOSITION THAN THAT PROVIDED BY THE MILD-MANNERED CHAVAN AND REDDY, THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO RECALCULATE HOW MUCH FREEDOM OF ACTION IT HAS, AND WHAT POLITICAL RISKS IT WISHES TO TAKE.

9. ANOTHER FUTURE TREND MAY BE AN INCREASE IN THE REGIONALIZATION OF INDIAN POLITICS. WITH JANATA STILL ARGELY CONFINED TO THE NORTH, MRS. GANDHI'S PARTY ENTRENCHED IN TWO SOUTHERN STATES AND REGIONAL PARTIES ESTABLISHED ELSEWHERE WEST BENGAL, TAMIL NADU AND JAMMU AND KASHMIR), THE OPPORTUNITY OF GREATER CENTER/STATE TENSIONS MAY INCREASE. WITH JANATA AS A PARTY MOSTLY OF HINDI-SPEAKERS, THE LANGUAGE ISSUE COULD BECOME A CONTENTIOUS ISSUE, PARTICULARLY IF MRS. GANDHI CHOOSES TO EXPLOIT IT FOR HER OWN ENDS. (WE SHOULD ADD, HOWEVER, THAT HER EXPLOITATION OF THE LANGUAGE ISSUE COULD BE AT BEST A SHORT-TERM TACTIC, LIMITED BY HER OBVIOUS INTEREST IN REBUILDING A BASE AMONG NORTHERN HINDI-SPEAKERS.) THE

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PRESSURES FOR ENHANCED STATE AUTONOMY FROM THE CENTER MAY ALSO INCREASE AND BECOME A MAJOR TOPIC OF PUBLIC DEBATE.

10. WE EMPHASIZE THAT THE ABOVE ARE ONLY PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE TRENDS IN THE INDIAN POLITY AS A RESULT OF THE STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. AS WE

EARLIER POINTED OUT, THESE ELECTIONS WERE LIKELY TO
HAVE CONSIDERABLE IMPACT UPON THE COURSE OF THIS
COUNTRY'S POLITICS. IT IS PREMATURE, OWEVER, TO
PREDICT HOW THIS "REALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES" WILL
ULTIMATELY SORT ITSELF OUT.
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